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## **Sex Role Egalitarianism and Relational Aggression in Intimate Partnerships**

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The University of Southern Mississippi

SEX ROLE EGALITARIANISM AND RELATIONAL AGGRESSION  
IN INTIMATE PARTNERSHIPS

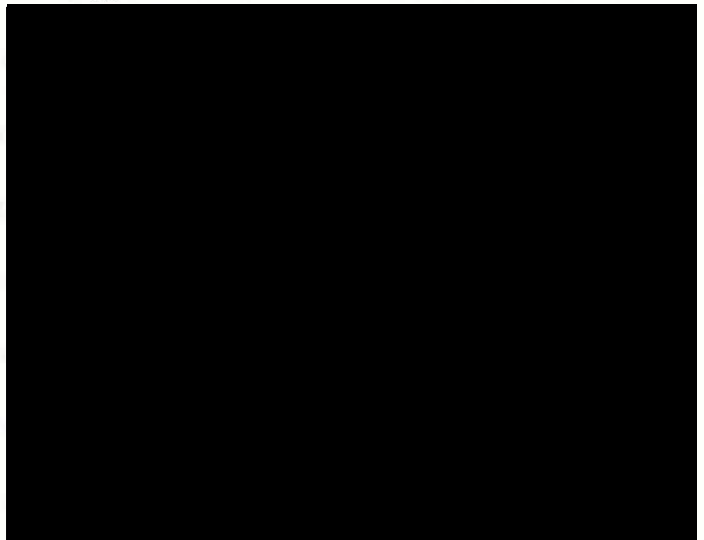
by

Emily Elizabeth Prather

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate School  
of The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts

Approved:



Dean of the Graduate School

May 2011

## ABSTRACT

### SEX ROLE EGALITARIANISM AND RELATIONAL AGGRESSION

#### IN INTIMATE PARTNERSHIPS

by Emily Elizabeth Prather

May 2011

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a serious problem with vast medical, psychological, financial, and social costs. Research indicates that IPV is particularly common among college students, however, little is known about relational aggression in this population. This study aimed to improve our understanding of relational aggression in the context of romantic relationships in a college sample by focusing on the potential roles of gender, sex role egalitarianism, acceptance of couple violence, and trait anger. As expected, trait anger was positively correlated with relational aggression. Acceptance of couple violence predicted the perpetration of relational aggression above and beyond the effects of trait anger and sex role egalitarianism. A significant gender effect was found, where men had lower levels of sex role egalitarianism. Lastly, sex role egalitarianism and gender both predicted relational aggression perpetration, however there was no significant interaction between the two, indicating that gender does not moderate the relationship between sex role egalitarianism and relational aggression perpetration.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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I	INTRODUCTION	1
II	METHODS	8
	Participants	
	Instruments	
	Procedure	
III	RESULTS	10
	Preliminary Analyses	
	Primary Analyses	
IV	DISCUSSION	14
	APPENDICES	19
	REFERENCES	22

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iii
LIST OF TABLES.....	v
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	vi
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. METHODS.....	6
Participants	
Instruments	
Procedure	
III. RESULTS.....	10
Preliminary Analyses	
Primary Analyses	
IV. DISCUSSION.....	15
APPENDIXES.....	19
REFERENCES.....	22

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	
1.	Alpha Coefficients, Means, Standard Deviations, and Univariate Tests by Gender.....10
2.	Intercorrelations Among Variables.....12
3.	Standardized Beta Coefficients and Change in R-Squares for Moderated Multiple Regression of Sex Role Egalitarianism, Gender, and Sex Role Egalitarianism x Gender on the Perpetration of Dating Violence.....12
4.	Hierarchical Multiple Regression of Trait Anger, Sex Role Egalitarianism, and Acceptance of Couple Violence on the Perpetration of Dating Relational Aggression.....14

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

### INTRODUCTION

1. Dating Relational Aggression Scale (Perpetration Subscale) - DRAS
2. Traditional-Egalitarian Sex Roles Scale - TESR
3. State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory-2 - STAXI-2
4. Acceptance of Couple Violence Scale - ACVS

symptoms (Johnson & Jang, 2001; Johnson, 2003; Ulrich et al., 2003). Other effects, especially those on children who witness violence, may not be evident until later when they repeat the cycle of violence they have learned (Thornberry & Ellis-Feld, 1994). Additional social costs include increased healthcare utilization, criminal justice expenses, emergency shelters and other services for victims, family instability, and homelessness (Miepov & Eckhardt, 2005; Ulrich et al., 2003).

Estimates of IPV vary in the literature, but it is clear that this form of interpersonal conflict is not reserved for married or cohabitating couples. Physicians estimate that dating violence is responsible for approximately 10% of the intentional injuries sustained by adolescents (Sage, Selgel, Perry, Goldstein, & Sprick, 1996), and IPV is thought to occur in 17 to 45% of the college population (Murray & Karimzade, 2007). In fact, Simon, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, and Sugarman (1996) found that IPV was more common among college students than in the general population, with 47% of college men and 35% of college women reporting use of physical aggression on a dating partner at least once in the past year. Far less is known about the behavior forms of aggression, which only contribute to the context of IPV in late adolescence. Simon and colleagues' (1996) study found that physical aggression was even more prevalent



## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is widely recognized as a serious public health problem with a myriad of costs not only to those proximate to the violence but also to society at large. Some of the more obvious effects on victims include acute and chronic injuries, traumatic stress, depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and a variety of physical symptoms (Johnson & Bunge, 2001; Robinson, 2003; Ulrich et al., 2003). Other effects, especially those on children who witness violence, may not be evident until later when they repeat the cycle of violence they have observed (Thormaehlen & Bass-Feld, 1994). Additional social costs include increased healthcare utilization, criminal justice expenses, emergency shelters and other services for victims, family instability, and homelessness (Murphy & Eckhardt, 2005; Ulrich et al., 2003).

Estimates of IPV vary in the literature, but it is clear that this form of interpersonal violence is not reserved for married or cohabitating couples. Physicians estimate that dating violence is responsible for approximately 10% of the intentional injuries sustained by adolescents (Sege, Stigol, Perry, Goldstein, & Spivak, 1996), and IPV is thought to occur in 17 to 45% of the college population (Murray & Kardatzke, 2007). In fact, Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, and Sugarman (1996) found that IPV was more common among college students than in the general population, with 47% of college men and 35% of college women reporting use of physical aggression on a dating partner at least once in the past year. Far less is known about the indirect forms of aggression, which may contribute to the context of IPV in late adolescence. Straus and colleagues' (1996) study found that psychological aggression was even more prevalent



than physical aggression among college students, with 74% of men and 83% of women reporting some form of psychological aggression against a dating partner at least once in the past year.

The present study focused on relational aggression, behaviors intended to damage another's relationships or exert social control (Ellis, Crooks, & Wolfe, 2009; Swearer, 2008), and the role it may play in the intimate partnerships of college students. Broadly, relational aggression involves social manipulation such as: gossiping, rumor spreading, and group exclusion (Bjorkquist, 1994). In the context of intimate relationships, it may also involve intentionally making a romantic partner jealous or threatening to end a relationship (Ellis et al., 2009). Family history of violence, attitudes towards women, attitudes towards the acceptability of violence, alcohol use, stress, angry temperament, high levels of jealousy, anxious attachment, lack of social support, and couple dynamics are all potential risk factors for IPV (Gidycz, Warkentin, & Orchowski, 2007; Murray & Kardatzke, 2007). This study examined relational aggression in relation to IPV, exploring the role of gender, gender role egalitarianism, acceptance of couple violence, and the propensity to experience anger.

Gender differences in IPV are well documented. Women and men report similar participation in reciprocal IPV and appear equally likely to initiate IPV. However, aggressive acts committed by men tend to be more severe and more likely to result in injury to the victim than those committed by women (Henning & Feder, 2004). In addition, women who initiate IPV are more likely to believe that their partner would not retaliate and did not intend to inflict serious harm (Fiebert & Gonzales, 1997). Not surprisingly, different variables appear to predict IPV committed by women and men.

For example, Luthra and Gidycz (2006) found that women's engagement in IPV was predicted by their partner's use of violence, alcohol use, father's use of violence, and maladaptive problem solving. On the other hand, men's engagement in IPV was predicted by alcohol use, partner's use of violence, and relationship length. Moreover, less variance in IPV was explained for the male subjects, suggesting that male IPV may be more situational and harder to predict from this combination of factors than female IPV. Although the nature of gender differences in relational aggression is presently unclear, it is expected that similar differences will be evident.

Gender role attitudes (i.e., beliefs about appropriate roles for women and men) have been implicated in IPV largely through their association with the expectations of violent men in dating relationships. These attitudes are typically measured on a continuum from traditional (i.e., responding to others based on stereotypical characteristics associated with their gender) to egalitarian (i.e., responding to others independent of their gender) (Berkel, 2004; King & King, 1997). Berkel, Vandiver, and Bahner (2004) found that men who supported traditional gender roles were more supportive of violence against a romantic partner. In addition, Jenkins and Aube (2002) found that self-absorbed (i.e., negative) masculinity predicted aggressive acts within relationships, not only for men but also for women. That is, women high on traditionally negative masculine traits (e.g., narcissism, toughness) were more likely to aggress against their partners than women low on these traits. Additionally, women with less traditional attitudes about men (e.g., opposing men's traditional dominance, toughness) tended to engage in more serious forms of physical aggression.

Attitudes towards the acceptance of couple violence may also play a role in relational aggression. However, the research in this area is limited, and usually measures attitudes toward global violence. O'Keefe (1998) found that one mediating factor connecting witnessing parental violence and IPV was accepting attitudes towards violence for men, but not women. Caron and Carter (1997) conducted a study regarding rape myths and acceptance of violence. Rape myths are statements that support the acceptability of rape such as "when a woman says no she is just playing hard to get." They found that acceptance of violence towards women and a lack of gender role egalitarianism predicted acceptance of rape myths in men. In broad cultural terms, Cohen (1998) found that the more accepting of violence one is, the more likely one is to be involved in violence perpetration. It was expected that attitudes toward couple violence would also be associated with relational aggression.

The role of dysfunctional anger has received considerable attention (Eckhardt, Samper, & Murphy, 2008) in IPV, but relatively little is known about the potential role of anger in relational aggression. Trait anger (i.e., one's tendency to experience angry feelings) is a consistent predictor of aggressive behavior and has been linked to perpetration of IPV (Lundeberg, Stith, Penn, & Ward, 2004; Parrot & Zeichner, 2003; Taft et al., 2006). Individual differences in the expression and control of anger also appear to be important in IPV. Eckhardt and colleagues (2008) found that men who committed IPV scored half a standard deviation above nonviolent men on both trait anger and anger expression. After clustering their sample into high anger-expressive, moderate anger-inexpressive, and low anger groups, they found that the high anger-expressive group and the moderate anger-inexpressive group made up 40% of the violent men and



were less likely to complete a traditional treatment program with no anger management than the low anger group. It was expected that trait anger would be similarly important in understanding relational aggression.

This study sought to advance our understanding of relational aggression among college students. Because relational aggression has received far less attention in the literature than other forms of IPV, it is important to determine whether it will be predicted by the same variables that predict physical aggression among romantic partners. Thus, the proposed study will examine gender, sex role egalitarianism, trait anger, and acceptance of couple violence as potential predictors of relational aggression in college students' dating relationships. The hypotheses were as follows:

H1: Trait anger will be positively correlated with dating relational aggression perpetration.

H2: The relationship between sex role egalitarianism and relational aggression will vary as a function of respondent gender (i.e., gender will moderate the relationship between sex role egalitarianism and dating relational aggression). It is expected that egalitarianism will be positively associated with relational aggression among women and negatively associated with relational aggression among men.

H3: Acceptance of couple violence will predict dating relational aggression, independent of trait anger and sex role egalitarianism.

## CHAPTER II

### METHODS

#### Participants

Participants were recruited using The University of Southern Mississippi Department of Psychology's on-line research system, and those who completed the study received research credit. The full procedure required approximately 30 minutes and was worth one research credit. Data were collected from 430 volunteers recruited from the psychology subject pool at The University of Southern Mississippi. However, 120 participants were excluded from the study (i.e., 50 were excluded due to missing data, four for completing the measures more than once, 42 for exceeding the target age range of 18-25, and 74 because they reported not being in an intimate relationship during the past twelve months). Thus, all analyses were completed using a sample of 260 students between the ages of 18 and 25 who reported that they were currently in a romantic relationship or that they had been in one sometime during the past year.

Of the final sample, 212 participants defined their relationship as "dating," 24 reported cohabitating with their partner, 16 reported being engaged, and eight reported being married. The average length of participants' relationships was 21.01 months. Ages ranged from 18 to 25 ( $M = 20.03$ ). The sample consisted of 77 men (30%) and 183 women (70%). The majority identified as Caucasian (58.5%) and African American (35.4%). The remainder of the sample identified as American Indian/Alaskan Native (1.5%), Asian (1.9%), Hispanic or Latino (0.8%), and other (1.9%). Two hundred forty-two of the participants identified as heterosexual, seven as bisexual, and ten as homosexual.

## Instruments

### *Demographics Questionnaire*

The demographics questionnaire consisted of seven questions regarding gender, age, racial background, religious affiliation, and romantic relationships.

### *Dating Relational Aggression Scale (Perpetration Subscale)*

The Dating Relational Aggression Scale is part of the healthy youth survey published by the McCreary Society. Responses are scored from 1 (*not at all true*) to 5 (*very true*). The perpetration subscale consists of five items and has an internal consistency of .75. The Dating Relational Aggression Scale correlates with measures of peer relational aggression and predicts internalizing behaviors, supporting the validity of the scale (Ellis et al., 2009).

### *Traditional-Egalitarian Sex Roles Scale (TESR)*

Larsen and Long (1988) developed a twenty-item scale to measure sex role attitudes on a continuum ranging from traditional to egalitarian. Respondents rate items on a five-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Higher scores indicate more traditional sex role attitudes. The split-half reliability coefficient is .85 and .91 when corrected with the Spearman-Brown Prophecy formula. Support for convergent validity has been reported through comparisons with other measures of sex role orientation (Larsen & Long, 1988).

### *State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory-2 (STAXI-2)*

The STAXI-2 is a 57-item self-report measure of the experience, expression, and control of anger developed by Spielberger (1999). One of the six STAXI-2 scales was used in the present study: Trait Anger (T-Ang). The 10-item T-Ang scale measures the



tendency to experience anger. Items are rated from 1 (*almost never*) to 4 (*almost always*) as to how well they describe the respondent. Internal consistencies via coefficient alpha range from .73 to .93 (Driscoll, Zinkivskay, Evans, & Campbell, 2006; Spielberger, 1999), and evidence of construct validity has been provided via factor analysis and in the form of correlations with measures of similar and dissimilar constructs (Freeman, 2001; Martin & Dahlen, 2007; Spielberger, 1999).

#### *Acceptance of Couple Violence Scale*

The 11-item Acceptance of Couple Violence Scale (ACVS), developed by Foshee, Fothergill, and Stuart (1992), measures the extent to which violence is accepted in dating relationship. Items are rated on a 4-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). Internal reliabilities for this scale range from .71 to .74 among early adolescents (Foshee et al., 1992). Evidence in support of the validity of the ACVS is minimal, however, theoretically consistent sex differences have been obtained (Kaura & Lohman, 2009), and a study of the Turkish translation of the scale found support for the factor structure (Sezer, 2008).

#### Procedure

Participants were recruited using the Department of Psychology's online research system, Sona Systems, Ltd. (<http://usm.sona-systems.com/>). Those who signed up for the study were taken to a consent form (see Appendix A) and all instruments hosted on PsychSurveys (<http://www.psychsurveys.org/>). All instruments were administered online. A brief demographic questionnaire was presented first, followed by the TESR, and all remaining measures in random order to minimize potential order effects. The rationale for presenting the TESR before all other instruments for all subjects is simply to

minimize the possible effects of negative emotion (i.e., questions about angry and aggressive reactions, attitudes toward violence, etc.) on sex role attitudes.

### Preliminary Analyses

Alpha coefficients were computed on all variables to determine whether they were sufficiently reliable that it could be assumed that they were measuring unitary constructs (see Table 1). All measures were sufficiently reliable ( $\alpha > 0.70$ ) to treat them as measuring unitary constructs. In order to explore the potential gender differences in the study variables and to determine whether data should be reported for the full sample or separated by gender, a one-way (Gender) Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was computed on all study variables.

Table 1

*Alpha Coefficients, Means, Standard Deviations, and Univariate Tests by Gender*

	Possible Range	$\alpha$	Women		Men		$F(1,256)$	$\eta^2$
			<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
T-Ang	10-40	0.890	18.01	5.75	18.77	5.29	0.96	.00
TEMR	20-80	0.818	39.24	8.09	42.22	8.09	7.40**	.03
DRAS-P	5-25	0.752	9.07	3.93	8.30	3.27	2.30	.01
ACVS	11-44	0.881	13.36	4.53	14.58	4.99	1.31	.01

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Note. T-Ang = Trait Anger Scale; TEMR = Traditional Expectations for Roles Scale; DRAS-P = Dating Relationship Aggression Scale.

Unidimensional. TEMR-P = Dating Relationship Aggression Scale - Perpetrator; ACVS = Acceptance of Couple Violence Scale.

## CHAPTER III

## RESULTS

## Preliminary Analyses

Alpha coefficients were computed on all variables to determine whether they were sufficiently reliable that it could be assumed that they were measuring unitary constructs (see Table 1). All measures were sufficiently reliable ( $\alpha > 0.70$ ) to treat them as assessing unitary constructs. In order to explore the potential gender differences in the study variables and to determine whether data should be reported for the full sample or separated by gender, a one-way (Gender) Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was computed on all study variables.

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	Range		$M$	$SD$	$M$	$SD$		
T-Ang	10-40	0.880	18.02	5.75	18.77	5.29	0.96	.00
TESR	20-80	0.818	39.24	8.09	42.22	8.09	7.40**	.03
DRAS- P	5-25	0.752	9.07	3.93	8.30	3.27	2.30	.01
ACVS	11-44	0.881	13.86	4.53	14.58	4.99	1.31	.01

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Note. T-Ang = Trait Anger Scale; TESR = Traditional-Egalitarian Sex Roles Scale; DRAS-V = Dating Relational Aggression Scale - Victimization; DRAS-P = Dating Relational Aggression Scale - Perpetration; ACVS = Acceptance of Couple Violence Scale.

Table 2 There was a significant multivariate gender effect,  $F(5,252) = 6.03, p < .001, \eta^2 = .11$ . Univariate tests identified gender differences on the TESR. Men scored slightly higher on the measure, indicating more traditional gender role attitudes. However, it is important to note that both males and females produced fairly low scores, indicating an overall leaning towards more egalitarian values.

### Primary Analyses

Intercorrelations among all variables were calculated for the full sample to facilitate interpretation of the subsequent regression analyses (see Table 2). To test the hypothesis that scores on the Trait Anger Scale would be positively correlated with those on the DRAS, Pearson  $r$  was computed between the Trait Anger Scale and the DRAS perpetration scale and a one-tailed significance test was used. As predicted, the Trait Anger Scale was positively correlated with DRAS Perpetration ( $r = .44, p < .001$ ).

In preparing to test the hypothesis that respondent gender would moderate the relationship between the TESR and the DRAS Perpetration subscale, scores on the TESR were centered to facilitate subsequent interpretation of any resulting interaction effects. Next, moderated multiple regression was used to test this hypothesis as follows: the TESR was entered on Step 1, respondent gender was entered on Step 2, and a TESR x gender interaction term was entered on Step 3. A significant change in  $R^2$  on Step 3 would indicate moderation. As can be seen in Table 3, there was no evidence of moderation, as the TESR x gender interaction term was not significant.



Table 2 (continued)

*Intercorrelations Among Variables*

	1	2	3
1. T-Ang	-		
2. DRAS-P	.44**	-	
3. ACVS	.41**	.51**	-
4. TESR	.09	.23**	.30**

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Note. T-Ang = Trait Anger Scale; DRAS-P = Dating Relational Aggression Scale – Perpetration; ACVS = Acceptance of Couple Violence Scale; TESR = Traditional-Egalitarian Sex Roles Scale.

Table 3

*Standardized Beta Coefficients and Change in R-Squares for Moderated Multiple Regression of Sex Role Egalitarianism, Gender, and Sex Role Egalitarianism x Gender on the Perpetration of Dating Violence*

	Beta	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1		.05**
TESR	.23**	
Step 2		.02*
TESR	.25**	
Gender <sup>a</sup>	.14*	
Step 3		.00
TESR	.19	

Table 3 (continued).

	Beta	$\Delta R^2$
Gender	.14*	
TESR x Gender	.08	

<sup>a</sup>Gender coded 0 = female/1 = male

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

Note. TESR = Traditional-Egalitarian Sex Roles Scale.

Finally, the hypothesis that the acceptance of couple violence would predict dating relational aggression perpetration independent of both trait anger and sex role egalitarianism was tested via hierarchical multiple regression. Scores from the Trait Anger Scale and TESR were entered on Step 1, and the ACVS was entered on Step 2. All three variables accounted for some variance in the DRAS-Perpetration scale, and ACVS accounted for variance above and beyond that accounted for by the TESR and the Trait Anger Scale (see Table 4).

Table 4

*Hierarchical Multiple Regression of Trait Anger, Sex Role Egalitarianism, and Acceptance of Couple Violence on the Perpetration of Dating Relational Aggression*

	Beta	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1		.24**
Trait Anger	.43**	
TESR	.20**	
Step 2		.10**



Table 4 (continued).

	Beta	$\Delta R^2$
Trait Anger	.29**	
TESR	.10	
ACVS	.36**	

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

Note. TESR = Traditional-Egalitarian Sex Roles Scale; ACVS = Acceptance of Couple Violence Scale.

As expected, trait anger was positively correlated with dating relational aggression perpetration. This relationship is consistent with previous literature on overt physical forms of aggression (Finkelhor et al., 2004). Trait anger has been a significant predictor of intimate partner violence (ITV) as assessed by Fox (Lundberg et al., 2004; Parrot & Zeichner, 2005; Taft et al., 2006). It appears that it is similarly related to relational aggression in intimate relationships.

The present study found no support for the hypothesis that respondent gender would moderate the relationship between sex role egalitarianism and dating relational aggression. Both gender and sex role egalitarianism predicted relational aggression perpetration in intimate partnerships, however, no interaction was found between the two. This finding was surprising when considered in the context of previous literature on sex role egalitarianism and overt partner aggression. For example, Herold and colleagues (2004) found that men with more traditional ideas regarding gender roles were more

## CHAPTER IV

### DISCUSSION

This study examined the relationships between trait anger, gender, sex role egalitarianism, acceptance of couple violence, and dating relational aggression perpetration. It was found that trait anger was positively correlated with dating relational aggression perpetration. Gender and sex role egalitarianism emerged as predictors of relational aggression perpetration. However, it was found that gender did not moderate the relationship between sex role egalitarianism and relational aggression. Finally, acceptance of couple violence emerged as a significant predictor of relational aggression, above and beyond the effects of trait anger or sex role egalitarianism.

As expected, trait anger was positively correlated with dating relational aggression perpetration. This relationship is consistent with previous literature on overt physical forms of aggression (Eckhardt et al., 2008). Trait anger has been a significant predictor of intimate partner violence (IPV) in several studies (Lundeberg et al., 2004; Parrot & Zeichner, 2003; Taft et al., 2006). It appears that it is similarly related to relational aggression in intimate relationships.

The present study found no support for the hypothesis that respondent gender would moderate the relationship between sex role egalitarianism and dating relational aggression. Both gender and sex role egalitarianism predicted relational aggression perpetration in intimate partnerships; however, no interaction was found between the two. This finding was surprising when considered in the context of previous literature on sex role egalitarianism and overt partner aggression. For example, Berkel and colleagues (2004) found that men with more traditional ideas regarding gender roles were more

likely to support violence against their partners. Moreover, Jenkins and Aube (2002) found that women who endorsed less traditional gender roles were more likely to physically aggress against an intimate partner. Given that these studies dealt with overt aggression while the present study focused on relational aggression, the most likely explanation for the divergent findings appears to be that relational aggression may be distinct from overt aggression in this way. Perhaps overt physical aggression and relational aggression follow different patterns concerning sex role egalitarianism and gender. This is an area that deserves further research, as it may inform our understanding of both forms of aggression.

Acceptance of couple violence was positively related to the perpetration of relational aggression in dating relationships. While the correlational nature of the study prevents causal interpretation, this finding is certainly consistent with the idea that persons with less negative attitudes toward couple violence would be more likely to engage in relational aggression in their intimate partnerships. As predicted, acceptance of couple violence predicted dating relational aggression, independent of both trait anger and sex role egalitarianism. This is consistent with previous research by Cohen (1998), showing that acceptance of general violence was linked to incidence of overt physical aggression. While it would be premature to draw conclusions from a single study, it is possible to speculate that the present findings may indicate that acceptance of couple violence is similarly relevant to understanding relational aggression.

In the present study, trait anger, acceptance of couple violence, and sex role egalitarianism all predicted the perpetration of relational aggression in intimate partnerships. One implication of these results is that targeting these predictors in



counseling may be a useful means of reducing relational aggression in intimate relationships. The finding that trait anger predicted relational aggression in intimate relationships provides further support of its relevance and the merits of reducing it. Researchers evaluating anger management interventions may want to include measures of relational aggression to determine whether existing treatments generalize to relational aggression or whether modifications to treatment are required. Another possibility, especially suited for the university environment would be preventative measures aimed at relational aggression on campus. Many universities have freshman orientations in which they discuss drinking, date rape, and other issues facing college students. Perhaps attitudes towards partner violence and gender roles could be addressed in these orientations in an effort to reduce relational aggression and IPV in general.

While this study adds to the growing literature on relational aggression among older adolescents and adults, it is important to note its limitations. First, the majority of our sample were women (70%) who identified as Caucasian or African American, so the degree to which findings may apply to men or to students of other racial backgrounds is unknown. Second, our sample identified as almost entirely heterosexual, preventing us from assuming that our results apply to homosexual couples. In future studies, it may be beneficial to look at the differences in relational aggression between heterosexual and homosexual couples and between dating, cohabitating, and married couples. Third, all measures were self-report, and it is possible that social desirability would lead participants to underreport relational aggression. Lastly, while we found significant predictors of relational aggression, the effect sizes were medium to small, and there is still a large amount of variance in relational aggression that is not accounted for by this

study's measures. Future research is needed to explore other variables, such as race, religion, and political affiliation, that may contribute to the variance in relational aggression in intimate partnerships.

Limitations aside, the present study attempted to shed light on the lesser researched area of dating relational aggression in a college population. Relational aggression research has primarily focused on peer relationships and grade school populations. The present study illustrates that relational aggression is present in college age intimate partner relationships. The present study also adds to the literature regarding correlates of relational aggression perpetration. This study was the first to look at trait anger, sex role egalitarianism, and acceptance of couple violence as predictors of relational aggression in intimate partnerships. Gaining a better understanding of these correlates allows for more specific interventions targeting intimate partner relational aggression. This study illustrated some of the similarities and differences between relational aggression and more overt forms of aggression in intimate partner relationships. The more information available about these forms of aggression and their correlates the more they can be prevented or intervened upon in real world settings.

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Phone: (601) 266-4801

Page 3 of 4 Mental Healthcare Resources

Phone: (601) 544-4641

4. **Confidentiality:** These questionnaires are intended to be anonymous, and your name is requested on this page only for the purpose of assigning research credit. The information you provide will be kept strictly confidential, and your name will not be associated with your responses in any way. If significant new information relating to this study becomes known which may relate to your willingness to continue to take part in this study, you will be given this information.
5. **Subject's Assurance:** Whereas no assurance can be made concerning results that may be obtained (since results from investigational studies cannot be predicted), the researchers will take every precaution consistent with the best scientific practice. Participation in this project is completely voluntary, and you may



APPENDIX A  
 CONSENT FORM  
 UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI  
 AUTHORIZATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH PROJECT

Consent is hereby given to participate in the study entitled: *Social Attitudes in Dating Relationships*

Purpose: This study is being conducted to investigate the relationship between gender, sex role egalitarianism, anger, and relational aggression in college students' romantic relationships.

1. Description of Study: Participants will be asked to complete questionnaires about attitudes toward gender, romantic relationships, and anger. Participants will also be asked to complete a questionnaire about behavior in romantic relationships online. This study should take approximately 30 minutes and will be worth one research credit.
2. Benefits: Although participants will receive no direct benefit from participation in this study, the information provided will enable researchers to better understand the role of attitudes toward gender, romantic relationships, and anger in relational aggression in college students' intimate partnerships.
3. Risks: There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study. If you feel that completing these questionnaires have resulted in emotional distress, please stop and notify the lead researcher (Dr. Eric Dahlen at Eric.Dahlen@usm.edu). If you should decide at a later date that you would like to discuss your concerns, please contact Dr. Eric Dahlen (Eric.Dahlen@usm.edu) at (601) 266-4601. Alternatively, you may contact one of several local agencies, such as:

University Counseling Center  
 200 Kennard Washington Hall  
 Phone: (601) 266-4829

Community Counseling and Assessment Clinic  
 Owings-McQuagge Hall, Room 202  
 Phone: (601) 266-4601

Pine Belt Mental Healthcare Resources  
 Phone: (601) 544-4641

4. Confidentiality: These questionnaires are intended to be anonymous, and your name is requested on this page only for the purpose of assigning research credit. The information you provide will be kept strictly confidential, and your name will not be associated with your responses in any way. If significant new information relating to this study becomes known which may relate to your willingness to continue to take part in this study, you will be given this information.
5. Subject's Assurance: Whereas no assurance can be made concerning results that may be obtained (since results from investigational studies cannot be predicted), the researchers will take every precaution consistent with the best scientific practice. Participation in this project is completely voluntary, and you may



withdraw from this study at any time without penalty or prejudice. Questions concerning this research should be directed to Eric Dahlen, Ph.D. (Eric.Dahlen@usm.edu). This project and this consent form have been reviewed by the Human Subjects Review Committee, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research participant should be directed to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board, University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-001.

6. Consent to Participate: I consent to participate in this study, and in agreeing to do so, I understand that:
- I must be at least 18 years of age,
  - I am being asked to complete a set of questionnaires, which will take up to 1 hour and for which I will receive 1 research credit, and
  - All information I provide will be used for research purposes and will be kept confidential.

I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary. If I decide to participate in the study, I may withdraw my consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.

I have read and understand the information stated, am at least 18 years of age, and I willingly sign this consent form. A copy can be printed by clicking on "file" at the top left and choosing "print" from the menu.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Subject name printed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Subject signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX B

## IRB APPROVAL LETTER



## THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

Institutional Review Board

118 College Drive #5147  
 Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001  
 Tel: 601.266.6820  
 Fax: 601.266.5509  
 www.usm.edu/irb

**HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION REVIEW COMMITTEE  
 NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION**

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Human Subjects Protection Review Committee in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
  - The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
  - The selection of subjects is equitable.
  - Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
  - Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
  - Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
  - Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
  - Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
  - If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months.
- Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 10032501

PROJECT TITLE: **Sex Role Egalitarianism and Relational Aggression in Intimate Partner Relationships**

PROPOSED PROJECT DATES: 03/15/2010 to 03/15/2011

PROJECT TYPE: **Dissertation or Thesis**

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS: **Emily Prather**

COLLEGE/DIVISION: **College of Education & Psychology**

DEPARTMENT: **Psychology**

FUNDING AGENCY: **N/A**

HSPRC COMMITTEE ACTION: **Expedited Review Approval**

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 03/29/2010 to 03/28/2011

Lawrence A. Hosman  
 Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.  
 HSPRC Chair

4-7-2010  
 Date

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